



Wildlife

Valley Forge National Historical Park is home to over 1,000 types of plants and animals. Seventeen of those are listed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as endangered, threatened, or rare. Historic information on the types of animals living in the Valley Forge area and how abundant they were during the time of the encampment is scarce and comes mostly from letters and other writings of the time.

For example, Samuel Whittaker Esq. of nearby Phoenixville, wrote in 1872: “At the time of settlement, wild turkeys were very abundant, and Penn wrote home to England that they weighed from forty to fifty pounds each. Wild pigeons were so numerous that they could be knocked over with clubs, and stones thrown into the flocks could not fail to strike some of them.” He also mentions the presence of bears, wildcats, and wolves.

Wild turkeys, wild pigeons, bears and wolves now are gone from the Valley Forge landscape. Other species are still here but, sometimes, in much greater or lesser numbers. For example, white-tailed deer, rarely encountered during the late 1700s, are frequently observed at Valley Forge today. In 2006, the total number of deer within the park was 1,218 individuals, or 244 deer per square mile. The increasing number of deer over the last few decades is attributed to the elimination of natural predators, such as bear and wolves, and the creation of ideal deer habitat in the mix of fields and forests typical of the suburban Philadelphia area and the park.

The impacts of abundant deer can be observed in the forests of Mount Joy next to you. As you look or walk into the woods, notice that the understory of ground cover and shrubs is completely missing. This is commonly referred to as a “browse line”. It is widely accepted that deer have played a major role in altering the type, location, and number of plants within our forests. Changes in the vegetation affect the wildlife dependent on those plants, such as ground and shrub nesting birds. The park has begun to develop a Deer Management Plan, scheduled for completion in 2008.